REPORT ON

INSTITUTIONALISM

FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON FAITH AND ORDER

Montreal, Canada 12-26 July 1963

Faith and Order Paper no. 37

THE REPORT
OF THE STUDY COMMISSION ON

INSTITUTIONALISM

Faith and Order Paper No. 37
World Council of Churches
COMMISSION ON FAITH AND ORDER
Geneva, 1963

OUTLINE

I. THE FIELD OF STUDY

The rediscovery of the unity of the Christian Church in our time is constantly expanding the range of the ecumenical quest. It is recognized that unity and disunity do not form aspects of the Church's life that can be considered in isolation. They are manifestations which are intimately interwoven with all the varied functions and activities of the Church.

It is not without reason, therefore, that the Faith and Order movement has gradually broadened its field of inquiry to include not only doctrinal differences separating the churches, but also sacraments and ministry, ways of worship, and scripture and tradition, to mention some outstanding emphases.

The work of the Commission on Institutionalism is a further indication of the expanding horizons of Faith and Order. It deals with a dimension of the ecumenical problem which, after having long received but scanty attention, has found increasing recognition in recent years. What is the ecumenical significance of the fact that the Church is a complex of social institutions in time and space, indeed, is itself an institution ? How do institutional factors — both in the Church and in society at large — affect Christian unity and disunity ?

The present inquiry on institutionalism brings to focus a long-standing though somewhat sporadic preoccupation of the Faith and Order movement with the role of so-called 'non-theological' factors in the search for unity. As the movement itself, so also its initial exploration of the influence of social and cultural factors originated in the United States. In preparation for the Edinburgh Conference in 1937, an American group produced a report entitled 'The non-theological factors in the making and unmaking of Church union.' [1] The report classified and described thirteen kinds of non-theological factors affecting interdenominational relations and the unity of the Church. The inventory covered a broad range of social, cultural, psychological and other factors such as the state, the enduring impact of past history, nationalism, race, language, class, vested interests, and differences of ethical judgment and mental attitude. Subordinating all these factors under the primary issue of differences in faith and order, the report in conclusion raised the question : 'Are they so peripheral as to be also negligible ? Do they depart so far from the central issues of a Conference primarily concerned with the Faith and Order of the Church that after this preliminary survey they may be dismissed ?'

The Edinburgh Conference paid scarcely any attention to the subject and made no provision for its further study. In the planning stage of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order, at Lund, Sweden, in 1952, the matter for the first time received serious attention, and the preliminary studies were summed up in a booklet entitled *Social and Cultural Factors in Church Division* [2]. The Lund Conference, recognizing the importance of this approach, included among the permanent functions of the Commission 'to study questions of faith, order and

[1] *Report No. 3 of the Commission on the Church's Unity in Life and Worship* (New York and London, 1937).

[2] London : SCM Press, 1952. The American edition was published under the title, *More Than Doctrine Divides the Churches.*

worship with the relevant social, cultural, political, racial and other factors in their bearing on the unity of the Church.'

The first North American Faith and Order Conference in 1957 represented a notable landmark in the developing concern with these matters in that no less than one-third of the Conference programme was devoted to an exploration of the bearing of 'cultural pressures' on the unity of the Church. Prominent among these were listed the high mobility rate of the American population, government policies and programmes, the educational system, and racial and economic stratification [1].

Meanwhile, the Faith and Order Commission had taken steps to implement the new assignment given to it at Lund. Realizing that more would be gained by a thorough analysis of some single aspect than by a general discussion of the boundless area of social and cultural factors, the Working Committee decided in 1955 to launch an inquiry focussed on institutionalism as being a fruitful point of access to the problem. This topic was chosen, not because institutionalism is necessarily at all times the most important social issue in interchurch relations, but because it is found in every situation to some significant degree, thus forming a common universe of discussion and comparison. A Study Commission on Institutionalism was authorized with the following terms of reference :

> To make a study of institutionalism as it affects all churches, and in particular : (1) the self-criticism of churches by which they may see their own structures sociologically as well as theologically ; (2) the relations both positive and negative of the churches to each other in the ecumenical conversation ; and (3) the pattern of church relations which is finding expression in the World Council of Churches as an institution [2].

The membership of the Commission included churchmen from various countries, representing several theological disciplines as well as sociology, history, and law. Since 1956 the Commission has pursued its study by means of exchange of papers and smaller annual meetings either in Europe or in the United States. It has held one full-scale meeting in England in 1960. In its work, it has also had the benefit of co-operation of several *ad hoc* consultants and contributors of papers.

Concentrating primarily on organizational aspects of institutionalism, the Commission has pursued two parallel lines of inquiry. It carried on a continuing discussion on basic issues such as the nature and function of institutions, especially as they operate in the Christian community, the Church itself as *koinonia* and as institution, order and organization, ecclesiastical bureaucracy, and tensions between denominational and ecumenical institutionalization. At the same time, the Commission sought to explore its subject from the empirical end by means of a series of case studies on the influence of institutional factors in actual church union projects. These include : The Church Union in Canada, 1925 ; Anglican-Methodist Relations in England ; The Methodist Union in England, 1932 ; The

[1] See *The Nature of the Unity We Seek : Official Report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order*, September 3-10, 1957, Oberlin, Ohio, ed. Paul S. Minear (St. Louis : The Bethany Press, 1958).

[2] *Minutes of the Working Committee of the Commission on Faith and Order*, Davos, Switzerland, 1955, p. 11.

Church of South India ; The Church of Christ in Japan ; The Pentecostal Movement and the Swedish Baptist Union, 1907-1920 ; Baptist-Disciples Conversations in the USA ; The Methodist Union in the USA, 1939 ; Presbyterian-Protestant Episcopal Union Negotiations in the USA ; and the United Church of Christ in America [1].

A word of explanation will be in place concerning the interdisciplinary procedure adopted by the Commission in its work as well as in the present report. The chief task of the Commission was to help the churches become self-critical of the manifold ways in which their institutional structures and procedures, in interaction with one another and with society, may either obstruct or support the quest for unity. It deals with an object — the Church — which is both a spiritual entity and an empirical social reality. Hence an adequate grasp of the problem requires an approach which combines theological reflection and sociological investigation. Sociological analysis being a neglected chapter in Faith and Order studies, the Commission has deliberately directed major attention to this aspect, notably in its case studies. It is evident that there are numerous aspects of institutionalism which elude theological categories of interpretation. Social institutions possess their own proper universe of discourse. Issues of institutional unification of churches cannot be resolved solely by direct inference from doctrinal and liturgical principles. Their solution requires practical wisdom and adequate knowledge of the workings of social organizations. On the other hand, since the Christian Church is a community *sui generis*, it is equally clear that the insights derived from sociological analysis need to be integrated into a theological frame of reference which explicates the institutions inherent in the very nature and purpose of the Church itself. In other words, the task of the Commission also includes the development of a theology of institution.

In consequence of this, the present report successively discusses the sociological and the theological problems of institutions. It then projects a series of guiding principles for assessing the ecumenical value of institutional factors in the life of the churches. Finally, it sums up some tentative findings emerging from the Commission's work thus far.

II. SOCIOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTION

The term 'institutionalism' has an ambivalent range of meanings which when applied to the Church immediately suggest widely differing values, processes, and problems. On the one hand, there are positive or constructive meanings in theology, ecclesiology, and social organization. On the other hand, there are pejorative or negative meanings related to the distortion or perversion of functions by processes and structures which intervene between intended goals and actual goals. In both cases the term 'institutionalism' requires clarification with respect to the idea of institution and the process called institutionalization. Such clarification must regard both theological and sociological definitions and theories, and must explore their relations to each other.

[1] See *Institutionalism and Church Unity* (Association Press, New York; and SCM Press, London, 1963).

Cultural history indicates that man has always lived in some form or structure of institutional arrangements which aided him in fulfilling basic social needs and gave meaning, authority, and stability to the cultural order in which he lived. These structures or institutional arrangements have not been merely instrumental, however ; they have often expressed his very nature. All cultures thus exhibit types of institutional life as parts of the permanent social existence. Such things as economic order, government, family, communication, art and religion are so basic as to be called by some anthropologists the functional prerequisites of culture. These aspects of culture take on institutional structure and organization in the religious manifestations of society as well as in the others. Indeed, religion gives ultimate meaning and coherence to man's experience within other institutions, without being superordinate as an institution itself.

Religion has a pervasive significance for a cultural system as a whole and can be considered an institution in this broad sense, and it has also a more restricted social significance as a concrete organizational institution. As we shall see below, theology as well as sociology has a concern for both these dimensions of the function of religion.

In earlier cultures the establishment and stabilization of institutions was guaranteed and justified by a higher order or power. Great numbers of people, unaware of the existence of any institutional pattern, accepted their social position (status) and its actualization (role) as a matter of destiny (e.g. birth, fate, or divine purpose). With the enlightenment of man and his increasing critical self-awareness he examined his institutions, his roles in them, and became restive with respect to his social status or position. Man began to shape, select, and control his institutions as a function of his own volition (autonomy). Nevertheless, man continued to be subject to the fundamental institutions which he has inevitably established as a member of society. This situation of the organic relationship of freedom and order involves and implies a specific ethical challenge : man becomes a responsible agent for and to the social order.

In this context, sociology defines an institution as a definite and established structure (goals, means, value orientation, sanctions) built around and sustaining one or more specific functions (sex control, sustenance, education, total social control). These two conceptual elements of structure and function illuminate many problems in institutionalism. A social function may be fruitfully understood as a whole activity which accomplishes a desired end or fulfills a basic need for society and for the individuals which make up that society. The desired end may be normatively interpreted, for example, by theological belief. For a functional approach to religion it is the process of believing and its interaction with society which is selected for study.

In a broader sense the task of sociology is that of delineating social institutions and tracing the processes by which specific institutions have been established. These processes of institutionalization require careful analysis along with identifying the agents of institutionalization. This term refers to the various factors which bring about stability of action around a function or functions. Such agents, for example, may be geographical, racial-national, or they may spring either from social classes or from a continuing self-awareness (in-group feeling) of a group. Institutionalization is a basic conception for understanding churches, since it refers both to the process through which relatively simple groupings become organized institutions and to the changed values, relationships, and procedures

which result from the process of interacting among the agents involved. Regardless of what the institutionalizing agent may be in a given case, the resulting institution serves to provide stability and uniformity of social action around some human need, basic or derived.

A word of caution is in order at this point. While analysing institutions and processes the sociologist needs to remind himself that he is concerned with a sociology of which he is himself a part. Social process involves individuals. In his analysis the sociologist may treat competently certain abstract or concrete role situations and structures as they become manifest in social action, but the full implication of personality and freedom of the individual may be lost to view. Just here sociology cannot obviate the need to regard human society as the field of God's free and spontaneous action toward and through man. A whole view requires that the Church, for example, be understood both sociologically and theologically.

The sociologist may regard the Church as an institution, even though instituted of God as the body of Christ, and as a social institution among other social institutions. Thus he considers the Church in the world and the agents of institutionalization which affect it and other institutions without pejorative implications regarding the *esse* of the Church. He considers the factors influencing the form and function of the Church, the changing roles and power structures in the Church as they reflect shifts in the societal manifestation of the Church, and the social acceptance or rejection of the Church, in its various types, by social classes or cultural groups at the core or at the margin of social structure.

However, as a Christian the sociologist sees the Church both as object of his faith and as field for his investigation. He sees not only a societal structure to be analysed and interpreted, but also the body of Christ whose unity and disunity is affected by the process of social interaction.

III. INSTITUTIONALISM AND THE CHURCHES' DISUNITY

To understand the bearing of institutionalism on the unity and disunity of the churches it is necessary to consider more fully the process of interaction which we have termed institutionalization, the more important institutionalizing agents, the major emergent types of religious organization, and other factors which the Commission have found to be especially significant. The theological context of this analysis we have already acknowledged and shall deal with more fully in a subsequent section.

1. Processes of Institutional Development

Many factors are involved in churches viewed as social institutions. There are organizational and structural factors to be noted particularly in church government such as polity, administration, bureaucracy, patterns of power and decision-making. They reflect, in part, cultural and economic factors operating often in combination with each other ; for example, the hierarchical bureaucracy of the late medieval church was dependent to a great extent upon the development of feudal economy as well as on papal administration.

In the development of the Church as a concrete historical institution, the interacting forces such as theological traditions, self-interpretations by councils, strong personalities, or cultural, political and economic processes, are clearly evident. Interaction is threefold, within a church, among churches, and between them and their respective environments. Within a church the heritage from the past and the interpretation of its heritage shapes its structure and life, but it may also be re-formed by certain personalities, by pressure groups or by some dramatic event. Among or between churches the interaction may have a positive or negative reference to church unity. To take a negative example, there may be competitive conflict, or the judgment that another church is not legitimate. These may lead to forms of protest and self-concern. In any case every church is in constant interaction with its social environment, to some degree giving shape to its society and culture and being shaped in varying degrees by its milieu.

2. Factors in Institutional Development

From the fact of dynamic interaction we must proceed to take note of the forces which give a church its institutional character. On the one hand, there may be extensive accommodation by a church body and it may be quite dependent on class or national life. On the other hand, there may be marked dissidence between a church and its social environment. In either case conflict within a church or among the churches may result. The social forces operating on a church may enter into its fellowship, its ecclesiastical organization, and its patterns of power.

Among factors in institutional development we may note, in this connection, geography, population distribution, national life, race, and class.

Often different denominations are largely limited by special geographical areas. These boundaries tend to circumscribe institutional development and limit the church to a region and its culture. A case study of Baptist-Disciples relations in the United States of America has noted how 'colloquial nationalism,' or sectionalism, had an adverse effect on union between these churches. Similarly, when organizational structure and church life of metropolitan areas meet those of rural areas the result is likely to be conflict rather than integration. Thus the geographical milieus may act as institutionalizing agents making for disunity between urban-centred churches and those with strong agrarian traditions.

But geography and demographic distribution may sometimes favour union, as was the case in the Methodist Church union in the USA. The two larger bodies involved in that union represented different geographical areas. Regional concentration of membership made for non-competition in most of the nation.

National factors can sometimes disturb relations between churches as, for example, in Northern Europe after the Reformation and contemporary church life in countries occupied by foreign powers. When the churches which had been strongly shaped by national forces spread through emigration, they entered a wider scene and their dependence upon special national backgrounds sometimes caused tension and disunity. State churches in Northern Europe became free-churches in America, the new geography and political setting providing new forces in their relationships on every hand. These forces have tended to work both for unity and for continued disunity. For example, nationalism has served both to encourage mergers and to separate American denominations from parent European bodies.

In a new milieu a common ethnic heritage may facilitate a church union, as in the case of the United Church of Canada, 1925. In Canada the three uniting churches were overwhelmingly British in cultural background, but the fact that one church was predominantly Scottish and Irish was a factor that reduced the degree of union which was achieved. On the other hand, innumerable national forces tend to break down sectional and racial antipathies and contribute to denominational unity on national levels. Such national forces have been transplanted into the background of the younger churches in Africa and Asia through the missionary movement. One may ask to what extent church unions in these continents are the product of a 'nationalization' of Christendom and a freeing from Western influences.

Of itself race is not an institutionalizing agent. However, racial characteristics become symbols and signs of class and caste stratification which do influence many aspects of church life and organization, invading even the willingness to baptize, to accept into membership, and to share in the fellowship of the Eucharist. The segregation of a racial minority played a role in the organization of The Methodist Church in the US. The demand for a separate Jurisdiction for Negro Churches was persistent in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and served to protect regional interests which had no inherent relation to the nature of the church.

So-called racial conflicts generally reflect historical class patterns. This is to say that social classes may in a high degree institutionalize a church or other religious organization. Class patterns are one of the most important factors in the development of denominations. Conflicts between different religious groups often reflect conflicts of class attitudes and class cultures. In the Canadian church union, class factors probably reinforced doctrinal and ethnic differences.

Due to geographical isolation, class structure, or other cultural factors society develops marginal groups of various kinds. These marginal groups are of special interest for students of unity and disunity because they express protest against dominant institutions and their structures. Such groups emerge especially under conditions of rapid social change for a variety of reasons, such as the various rates of social change in different parts of society, deviating groups emerging under conditions of social frustration, and the role of agrarian elements in a dynamic industrial society. Religious groups operating at various points in the economy or body politic are bound to reflect the group interest of their members in relation to the general development of the society. These institutionalizing agents may thus have a fairly extreme position in the society in which they operate, but under other circumstances they may also be congenial to all society. The sociologist must study the social conditions and variable factors which make for harmony and integration or for conflict and disintegration.

In the main, then, we may distinguish three principal types of institutionalization, that by an inclusive culture, that by an exclusive dominant group, and that by marginal groups. Institutionalization by an inclusive culture may be illustrated by the role of the state or the whole nation, or by groups which more or less identify themselves with the whole nation and which are deeply rooted in the cultural and social heritage and thinking of the nation. The whole early and patristic period of the Church is illuminated by the application of this concept both to the environment of the Church and to the Church itself, which regarded itself at once as the new Israel and as the rightful heir of the whole Jewish tradition.

The role of the exclusive dominant group may be illustrated by the period in which Mediterranean culture as a whole began to disintegrate and Roman culture became more exclusive. The Church became, through the dominant status of the Church of Rome, a more national church institutionalized by a more or less exclusive culture. The schismatic movements of the fourth and fifth centuries reflect in part this disintegration of the older culture into one dominant culture and marginal sub-cultures as background. Different national and sectarian trends were institutionalized by small marginal groups.

Today the positive and critical attitude which the Church assumes toward national cultures reflects these same problems. The present common institutionalization by exclusive cultures of necessity compels marginal groups to break with the older religious institutions that are too deeply rooted in them. Every time an earlier inclusive culture is broken down, the same risks as those that operated in the breakdown of the old Mediterranean culture appear to be acute. The marginal groups are often compelled to seek to adjust themselves to the new situation without the help of the mother church. On the other hand it is very difficult for traditional forms of religious organization to adapt to dynamic social change without major disturbances.

A very serious question is how far schisms depend upon forces within a church operating in the direction of exclusiveness and marginality, creating boundaries that are not valid in Jesus Christ. In the primitive church for example, there was an inclusiveness that 'transcended all boundaries.' The very definition of religious truth, however, tended in due course to reflect the exigencies of church discipline, national psychology, social tradition, cultural heritage, and economic interest. In schisms the 'disinherited' are not simply those whom economic and political differences have cut off from the predominant religious institution. Their alienation is also due to differences in belief, form of worship, and moral emphasis demanded by their different needs. Hence a serious understanding of unity and disunity must take note of variations in personal religious needs and interests, variations in economic and political interests, national differences, social mobility and social change, and differences deriving from the internal development of the religious system — and all of these should be seen as part of a complex matrix of interaction.

3. Typology of Religious Institutions

Sociologists since the days of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch have found typology a fruitful scientific device for studying social institutions. An 'ideal type' is a working tool in making a functional analysis because it helps to classify religious group structures as they reflect the variations in religious interests and needs among the members of a differentiated society. These classifications have proved helpful in analysing the relationship between society and religion. Such 'ideal types' have an arbitrary element in that they 'over-simplify' the data by overlooking minor differences in order to emphasize what are thought to be major similarities. They are constructs or models in the investigator's mind ; they are not descriptions of total religious or social 'reality.' Ernst Troeltsch constructed a famous scheme of classification using 'church-type' and 'sect-type.' This scheme in its 'ideal' form presented two end points on a communion and left much complex data insufficiently interpreted. He then introduced another conception called 'mysticism,' but it failed to illuminate sufficiently the dynamic relation between religious organizations and society.

Since Troeltsch's classic formulation, many others have been introduced by social scientists. One of those typologies (as in Becker and Yinger) proposes a six-fold classification : church, ecclesia, denomination, sect, established sect, and cult. This typology may be fruitfully used to show the variables in society in terms of which the various kinds of religious organization are most likely to occur or be maintained. It recognizes that there may be a movement in the interaction of Church and society from a 'sect-type' to a 'church-type.' Such a functional analysis is not an evaluation but serves only interpretive purposes.

Given the reality of the ecumenical movement and the wide variations of social environment in the relation to the many kinds of social organizations of the 'churches,' a new typology is needed : one that is more inclusive and takes into account both the dynamic aspect of churches as processes of ongoing institutionalization and the self-interpretation of the religious bodies themselves. From an ecumenical standpoint a more unbiased nomenclature and 'ideal-type' definitions are required, since some religious bodies called 'sects' by sociologists are member churches of the World Council of Churches.

Despite the need for a more effective working tool, the typological method is useful in illuminating the relationships between church bodies and society, and hence the relationships of these bodies to each other in respect to movements of unity and disunity. For example, Presbyterian member churches in the World Council of Churches may relate quite differently to other churches depending on widely differing social environments as in Scotland, Holland, South Africa, or the USA, and the Methodist bodies function differently depending on whether they are in the USA, Scandinavia, or South America. These differences can be schematized and they can have a direct bearing on unity and disunity.

4. Institutional Factors which Affect Unity and Disunity

The studies undertaken by the Commission indicate some of the organizational factors that create tension and lead in some cases to schism and in others tend to foster unity. Unfortunately, the cases analysed thus far, except in three instances (one each from England, Japan and Sweden), cover only North American situations. Nevertheless, some factors can be noted in them which probably have implications for other areas and churches. We turn, first, to instances in which tension and schism can be delineated.

The process of institutional growth can itself become a source of tension within a church. Christian groups that cherish warm personal relationships and informal ways of working together, sometimes find that they are developing more formal organization for the sake of good order, the achievement of goals, and participation in wider social relations. Such a process can become disruptive, as it did in the development of the Baptists in Sweden, where, as a protest against formalizing and nationalizing tendencies, the Pentecostal churches came into being. Tension which developed in opposition to formal institutional growth may perpetuate disunity among church bodies, even when it has not caused the initial schism.

A different kind of factor is the desire to maintain harmony and to reduce tension within a denomination. This may lead it to withdraw efforts at church union when these threaten serious dissension within it. This was a major element in the decline of promising efforts to bring together the American Baptists and the Disciples of Christ. The forces of dissent often cluster around a leader who appeals to tradition, or to fears of change, or even to the limited interests of a segment of the church body.

Another factor is the protection of minority rights or the preservation of group interests within negotiations. The American case studies of Methodist reunion and the Baptist-Disciples negotiations took note of such problems. They were also factors in the actual consummation of union at the level of amalgamation of organizations, as in the case of the United Church of Christ in America. The desire to maintain unity within a body having a high church and low church polarity may prevent the whole denomination from moving forward in negotiating with others.

Then too we may note the function of the different ways of distributing power and authority in religious bodies. The patterns by which various boards and agencies work internally, along with the type of relationships developed between staff personnel and the boards to whom they are responsible, and the relationships of both boards and personnel to their churches, become stumbling blocks in the way of the actual union of churches. Church agencies with generally the same functions and purposes develop specific concepts of mission and style of work and life that are organizationally embodied. Unification must overcome these differences and find new common lines, as the United Church of Christ has learned. Even where the general polity lines are very similar, as was the case in northern and southern branches of Methodism in the USA, the differences in the authority and power of bishops, laity, and general conferences of each group became matters of major negotiation.

Such considerations as these do not exhaust the list of the disruptive possibilities of institutional factors, but we must note that institutional factors may also facilitate unity efforts. For example, establishing councils of churches in various geographical locations and at various levels of co-operation points to the expectation and reality that the development of new organizations is both an expression of unity and a means to achieving greater unity. The positive role of organization requires that ecumenical purpose must find those organizational forms which most adequately embody it in various places and must seek to fulfill itself more adequately through present organizations. Not only councils of churches but the practical necessity to establish union congregations in certain areas has been an impetus to more extensive unifications. The frontier-like situation in Western Canada in the first quarter of the twentieth century — and there are comparable situations elsewhere in the world — was conducive to wider ranges of co-operation and facilitated the union of denominations. Moreover, co-operation in certain organizational functions has on occasion been a positive unitive factor, as for example the preparation of a common hymnal by Disciples and Baptists in the United States. Then too, common views of the authority and roles of the ministry have been institutionally significant in several cases of negotiation in England and North America.

The fact that increasing institutional efficiency is expected as a result of successful church unions should not be overlooked in this connection. Proponents of union often stress this point in their efforts to gain support, but the reduction of overlapping functions and duplication of work is a hope that is not always achieved. The continuation of competing Methodist chapels in English cities and towns after the union of 1932 is a case in point. Opponents of union often stress the fear of monolithic organization despite its greater efficiency in some respects.

The success of previous mergers stimulates enthusiasm for new ones. In England, Canada, and the USA, there has been ample evidence of this tendency

to explore new unions when prompted by effective mergers. The spirit of such exploration sometimes expresses itself in 'comity' arrangements, whereby denominations make agreements, often through a council of churches, as to who shall develop new congregations in designated unchurched areas.

Still other factors should be briefly cited. The institutional devices of committees on church union, of exchanges of preachers, of fraternal delegates at church conferences, of joint preparation of educational materials, and of interdenominational projects in the inner city are cases in point. Moreover, where operating procedures have become in fact similar (though in theory they differ greatly, e.g., episcopal and presbyteral, congregational and presbyteral) the process of unification is made easier. Long co-operative experience in the conciliar movement tends to encourage growth in similar operating procedures on many problems of church life. On the other hand, the qualitative evidence seems to suggest that bureaucracy is a negative factor in church unity. In any case, the absence of extensive bureaucracies in the churches that made up the United Church of Canada in 1925 may have made that merger easier than it would otherwise have been.

Group structures and processes should not conceal that aspect of institutional development which is carried by, and reflects, personal leadership. Structure and function finally mean little if personal innovation and decision-making are ignored. Even in the most highly organized and apparently impersonal bureaucracy the role of the individual person must not be overlooked. Personal leadership faces two ways. There is internal organizational development in which the leader is an active participant. On the other hand, the bureaucrat faces outward and represents his organization in relation to other bodies. The function of the initiator is less formal and overt in small intimate groups. It is more formal but no less indispensable when an informal group moves on into more formal organizational phases of development. Always some person or group of persons serves as a catalyst. The initiative is sometimes quite deliberate and purposive as, for example, when a national council of churches co-ordinates or starts a new local council of churches. The case studies consistently reflect the significance of leadership that is committed to the ecumenical purpose and is willing to exercise practical wisdom as negotiations develop. All phases and dimensions of the ecumenical movement witness to this factor, for the formation of the World Council of Churches cannot be understood apart from the executive ability of key men.

5. Some Specific Problems

The factors which have been cited in this report emerge primarily from the theoretical considerations inherent in the theological 'given' of the Church and from the case studies which the Commission has thus far undertaken. Some specific problems which require special study should be called to the attention of the churches. These are: *(a)* authority, power, freedom and leadership roles and *(b)* bureaucracy.

(a) *Authority, Power, Freedom and Leadership Roles*

These problems constitute a cluster of factors which are persistent organizational and institutional issues. Power, it is agreed, is as such neither good nor evil, nor can it be excluded from the Church as a 'spiritual body.' Where there

is no power, there is no effect and little social reality. The contention is made that power within the Church can be, and actually has been, used not only for the promotion of religious purposes, but, intentionally or unintentionally, for the pursuit of other than legitimate religious ones. In the exercise of power, means and ends are so clearly interwoven that the means which are used qualify the ends which are achieved. The authority which makes power legitimate at any point of its exercise is therefore a basic issue.

Sociologists and historians agree that there is a clear difference between the type of authority of the charismatic leaders of the first generation in founding a religious body or building up a church and that exercised by the leaders who follow later on. The second generation tends more to be concerned with consolidating efforts and with preserving power, including the structure of their own organization and the legitimacy of their office and status. This process called by Max Weber the 'routinization of charisma' is one which affects not only individual church bodies but even the character of the membership of the churches in an ecumenical body like the World Council of Churches. From this fact several questions emerge.

Is there any strengthening of the individual self-consciousness of a denomination by the fact that it belongs to the ecumenical movement? Does membership result in a growing readiness to be integrated (to integrate one's own denominational body) into the larger unity? Does membership in the World Council of Churches confer a specious status upon the member churches? Have they a greater willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit to change their organizational and even their institutional form? Does the institutional *status quo* of prestige through membership influence their failure to take steps toward greater unity? How does ecumenism affect the structure of power and the patterns of leadership within a participating church? There is general recognition of the fact that ecumenism may be threatened by strong confessionalism and that the ecumenical concept may be altered by denominational leaders so as to strengthen patterns of confessional federation.

Power, authority and leadership vary according to types of organization. This brings us back to our earlier discussion of typology where we noted the need for a new typology of churches belonging to the World Council of Churches. For purposes of the present discussion we may distinguish two major organizational types: the associational such as the Baptists or Disciples of Christ, and the corporate such as the Anglicans or Presbyterians. The associational type tends to be less powerful organizationally than the corporate type and exercises less central authority over individual congregations. This distinction shows a real dilemma of power. A unified organization can wield power more easily than a loosely knit organization, but at the cost of the freedom of its member units. To be sure, associational bodies may develop pragmatic power patterns which are not provided for in their theories of polity, and corporate bodies may encourage marked democratic checks on centralized agencies. Nevertheless, co-operation among denominations or other church bodies calls for the associational type of organization, since no single organization can simply enforce its own rules and goals on the partners. In the conciliar pattern of co-operation there is implicit a pragmatic tendency toward a certain ecclesiological conception of handling church power, which in the long run may affect the general ecclesiological nature of church unity.

Power variously organized in the denominations or churches affects their relationships to the secular order and in this way also to each other. Stress on the entire freedom of the Church from any secular organization (the limit situation), e.g. the state, might impinge upon the influence of the Church on the world and reduce it to a state of powerlessness. Contrariwise, too close a union between state and Church (the opposite limit situation) may result in an uncritical sanctification of a secular power structure and, in its turn, to a limitation of the freedom of the Church. Thus the Church is faced with the extremes of social irrelevance or compromise. This situation is sometimes called 'the dilemma of leadership.' In order to lead, the Church must have at one and the same time inner spiritual integrity and outer social involvement. The Church is most likely to be socially effective when it is most aware of the dilemma of leadership, when it has many leaders with charismatic power, and when it has an optimum degree of autonomy amidst conditioning social institutions. These dilemmas and promises of effectiveness apply to the World Council of Churches as well as to member churches. The more it tries to move toward situational concreteness from the level of general statements, conceived on the conference or assembly level, the more urgent does the power problem become, as when the World Council of Churches seeks to win the co-operation of governments, industrial management, labour organizations, and the like.

Another difficult problem is the distribution of power within one organization. To reach their goals religious institutions need widespread active co-operation of their constituencies. Management of the religious body by a few experts does not suffice. Yet as an organization grows in size, it needs functionally specialized roles and develops these regardless of the theoretical basis of its local units or polity as a whole. There is a trend toward an 'upward delegation' of power and authority from the local level or regional groupings to the head of the organization. There is also a 'downward delegation.' Sometimes these trends correspond to formal constitutional provisions and sometimes they are informal and pragmatic. But the two trends are not identical; and hence a problem arises for a church when ecumenical agreement at the top levels does not meet with the sympathy of the people on the local or regional level. Consensus and consent are involved. The same kind of problem arises when local churches try to unite without having the consent of their higher organizational authorities.

One way of noting the difference between the roles of local church people and the administrative top is in terms of 'reference groups.' These 'reference groups' denote the various environmental agents that are particularly relevant to the effective operation of a person or social body. For local church people they will often be different from those for top denominational leaders. At the local level the 'reference groups' which may bind them, such as racial, linguistic and class factors, may be stronger than the global organizational relationships. When a local group fails to see the connection between the superior goal and its own life, it may show apathy or even opposition to the realization of that goal. This principle applies even when the theological purposes or mission of the church are at stake. Local or denominational concerns of a limited kind have a better chance to get the attention of the people in local groups than do the world-wide, and therefore somewhat remote, concerns which seem somehow unrelated to the lives of the constituency of a local church. This factor often explains much of the frustration experienced by ecumenical leaders in a given situation.

(b) *Church Bureaucracy*

Modern society shows an increasing awareness of the fact and problems of bureaucracy. The role which bureaucracy plays within the Church is not unlike that which it plays in any well-developed social body or organization. This role is ambiguous because it is ambivalent. Bureaucracy faces inward as it relates to patterns of organization, leadership, and control within an institution and it faces outward toward other organizations. Bureaucracy relates to ingroups and to outgroups. The bureau is a place where power is concentrated and administratively exercised. It tends to gain a hierarchical structure, even in non-hierarchical bodies, though the conceptions of bureaucracy and hierarchy are clearly distinguishable. Bureaucracy is a mixed blessing.

Bureaucracy promotes technical efficiency and maximizes vocational security. Thus tenure, pensions, incremental salaries, and regularized procedures for promotion are related to leadership security. Control, continuity, administrative discretion, and rational order make for institutional efficiency. But the virtues of bureaucracy become vices when corrective measures are neglected. It makes for anonymity in personal relationships and often inhibits the desire for unity because of the following traits. Bureaux tend to protect and stand for the interests of the special group which they serve ; they tend to be concerned with specially assigned tasks without considering the larger contextual issues ; they tend toward oligarchic control, bureaucrats making decisions without majority or adequate consent ; they tend to stress organizational success in the competitive struggle for social survival ; they have a tendency toward 'empire building,' i.e. becoming a centre rather than a servant of social institutions ; and they encourage the traits of the 'organization man.'

The ambiguity of bureaucracy is particularly evident in a period of instantaneous world communication and rapid transportation. Bureaucratic structures and decisions are at once more inevitable and more dangerous.

Indispensable as bureaucratic structures and procedures are in large or complex institutions, they encourage blindness to needed change, trained incapacity to sense new needs, inflexibility in the application of skills to changed conditions, and fixation on goals and objectives however obsolescent. Bureaucracy affects unity and disunity in the churches because it often encourages a transference of sentiments and motivations from the true aims of the organization to the particular details of behaviour required by rules and rubrics, thus transforming means into ends and instrumental values into terminal values. Moreover, church bureaucracy is not necessarily based upon the spiritual function and authority within the Church but on expediency in reaching certain organizational ends. Since local churches often lack the expert knowledge, competence and effectiveness necessary for the expansion of ecclesiastical organization, they consent to having those tasks undertaken by experts at an institutionally higher level. These in turn seek permanence for their own bureaux and thus forestall mergers, whether the issue be between hierarchical-episcopal bodies or between those of a congregational type.

On the other hand, church bureaucracy cannot always be blamed for forestalling mergers. Many bureaucrats are eager for union programmes and proposals. There are examples of willingness on the side of church superiors to promote union on the highest level. At the same time, these leaders often prevent local churches from uniting.

Thus we must note in summary that the problem of bureaucracy is fraught with ambiguity and ambivalence, and like the issue of power, authority and freedom partakes in the problem set forth by the incarnation of the Word of God in the Church at large. On the one hand, the Church reflects in its very being God's incarnation in the world and therefore it cannot be without power and authority. On the other hand, incarnation readily becomes a condition where the Church is transmuted into a self-maintaining body interested primarily in its own preservation or existence. When the Church becomes a means of self-vindication as an earthly organization, its power is no longer subservient to the lordship of Christ and it loses its true character as reflecting the lordship of Christ in humility and love.

IV. THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION

1. A Theological Approach

As stated at the outset, the task facing the Commission required an inter-disciplinary approach if it was to attain a realistic understanding of the role played by institutional factors. The intensive theological investigations of the Church undertaken by Faith and Order and, on the other hand, the lack of attention given to sociological analysis, have led the Commission to devote major attention to the latter aspect. The preceding section will have shown that such a study — especially when it proceeds to evaluations — involves definite theological assumptions and raises fundamental issues about the nature of the Church. To distinguish, for example, between those institutional factors which promote and those which hinder unity, presupposes a theological judgment about what constitutes Christian unity. Thus the sociological investigation calls for its interactive complement in a theological reflection on the significance and function of institution in the Church. It is to this matter that we now turn.

While ecumenical thinking on the Church, in important respects, has reached a stage of creative rediscovery and convergent restatement, this particular area still remains one of the most controversial and unsettled. For it includes a host of problems which are under vigorous debate in contemporary ecclesiology, such as spirit and form, charisma and order, structure and function, freedom and authority, continuity and discontinuity, visibility and invisibility.

In approaching this complex problem of the Church as institution, our Commission faced the notorious difficulty of not being able to assume a commonly accepted definition of the Church. Two solutions were discarded as inadequate: (i) to undertake a comparative study of prevalent doctrines of the Church with a view to extracting their common elements as a basis of departure; (ii) to undertake a similar analysis of the institutional self-interpretations of various denominations, adopting their composite view of the role of institutions in the Church as a fixed point of reference. Inquiries of this kind may undoubtedly supply useful data, enabling the churches to learn from one another by way of comparison and mutual correction. But, remaining in the empirical context of a divided Christendom, they fail to yield a transcendent vantage point from which to judge the multifarious institutions of contemporary churches. In line with the approach which has characterized the Faith and Order programme generally in recent years, the Commission has instead turned its attention to biblical-theological consider-

ations of the foundations, nature and mission of the Church, and of its institutional characteristics. In what sense is the Church, by its very nature, an institutional complex? Is the Church — as the people of God, the Body of Christ — articulated in a determinate order, in institutional structures and functions which, although always clothed in historical forms, nevertheless provide 'archetypal' guidelines for assessing present institutions?

The question is bristling with difficulties. An adequate answer would have to come to terms with a wide range of problems such as the theological meaning of the institutions and the moral, ceremonial and legislative codes of the people of Israel, the manner in which they were appropriated and transformed in the 'New Israel,' the institutions given by the Lord to his Church, church order in New Testament times, and the gradual development from a diversity of fluid forms to the consolidated structure of early Catholicism.

While mindful of all these issues, the Commission has not seen it as its task to engage in broad-scale biblical and historical research. Instead, it has chosen to avail itself of the preliminary studies on the nature and structure of the Church carried out in other areas of the Faith and Order movement — notably the report of the Study Commission on 'Christ and the Church,' and the section report on 'order and organization' from the North American Faith and Order Conference at Oberlin, Ohio, 1957[1].

In doing so, our objective has been to suggest the lineaments of a theology of institution, sufficient for the immediate purpose of the Commission.

2. The Church: A Divine-Human Community

First, then, we may note in summary fashion some of the pertinent insights emphasized in these ecumenical studies on the Church. 'The Father, the Son and the Spirit together as one God must be seen as the ground of the Church.'[2] The Church is set 'in the world of time and space... to be used by God for the fulfillment of creation's purpose.' Visible in history, it 'derives its life from the spirit of the Risen Christ, and already belongs to the world to come,' and 'the unity which the Church is commissioned to manifest in the world is derived from the perfect unity of the triune God.' It is united to Christ 'through a *koinonia* in which Christ and his Church are neither to be separated from one another nor confused with one another.' By calling the Church the Body of Christ, the Apostle Paul suggests its intimate participation in the life of its Head and the mutual participation of the members in one another. That communion with Christ is a communion with the empowering and life-giving Spirit, a life of righteousness and peace and ecstatic joy (Rom. 14. 17) — but not of self-willed and capricious disorder. 'Participation in Christ and the Holy Spirit as well as in the life of fellow Christians was governed and judged by the Scripture, by the tradition of the apostles, and by the sacrament of the fellowship established by the Lord. At the same time, the manifestation of the Spirit brought the divine life and power into Scripture, tradition and sacramental acts.'

[1] See *One Lord, One Baptism* (London: SCM Press, 1960; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961) and *The Nature of The Unity We Seek: official Report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order*, Oberlin, Ohio, 1957, ed. Paul S. Minear (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), pp. 229 ff.

[2] The quotations are taken from the publications mentioned above.

Thus the Church is a divine-human community carrying 'the mission of proclaiming and embodying the reconciling work of God in Christ.' Its worship, its proclamation of the Gospel, its life in loving solidarity with suffering mankind, are expressions of its high calling to be a redeemed community serving God's redemption of the communities of man.

In many statements such as these, the work of our sister Commissions gives succinct expression to lines of thought which run closely parallel to our own and with which we therefore wish to associate ourselves. In their case, they are primarily concerned with the task of elucidating the relationship existing between the Church in history and the triune God, while in our case we are concerned as well to understand the Church as a complex institution, influenced by the environment of this world of change, sin and mortality and, in turn, influencing that environment.

3. Koinonia and Institution

Theological reflections on our subject matter are often predicated on the assumption of a polarity between the personal fellowship of believers and, on the other hand, the institutional structures and arrangements of the Church. To pave the way for an adequate grasp of the problem, we need first of all to remove three misconceptions which have played a nefarious role in Christian history. The first is the virtual identification of the Church with an elaborate institutional system. While here the truth is taken seriously that the presence and work of the Spirit expresses itself in institutional structures, it endangers the equally valid truth that the Spirit remains the sovereign Lord over those structures and is not bound by them. The second misconception — which is the insidious temptation of modern Protestantism in particular — is to posit a dichotomy, or even an opposition, between the free and unfettered fellowship of Christian believers and ecclesiastical structures. This tendency is generally undergirded by a spiritualizing interpretation of the New Testament evidence, according to which the *koinonia* of the Spirit was a strictly personal fellowship in faith and love, uncontaminated by any institutional features. The influence of such an ecclesiological docetism is apparent in the not infrequent contention that the Gospel stands for a purely spiritual and invisible unity as over against an organizational unity. The third misconception represents another type of unhistorical anachronism. Claiming to find a normative church order in the New Testament, it conveniently rediscovers the exact counterpart of that church order in the scholar's own denomination — thereby overlooking the brittleness of the evidence, and the diversity and fluidity of the forms in which the early community expressed its life in Christ.

The problem of Church and institution is intimately linked up with the relationship of continuity and transformation which connects the old Israel and 'the new Israel,' the Church. This relationship has sometimes been construed in such fashion as to suggest that the emergence of the Gentile church under the charismatic leadership of Paul involved a clean break with the institutional traditions of Israel. Current scholarship, however, with its recognition of the profound and abiding Christian appropriation of the sacred history of Israel, has shown this to be a gross oversimplification. The reconstituting of the people of God as the Church of Christ on the day of the Spirit meant not an abolition but a transformation of its institutional life. The New Testament freely uses institutional language in describing the Church, as, for instance, when it calls the Church a 'royal

priesthood' and a 'holy nation' (I Peter 2. 9) — two fundamental institutions in the history of Israel, now profoundly altered as they were lifted up into the New Covenant. The Lord's own life offers the paradigmatic examples : his baptism in John's Baptism, his announcement of the messianic kingdom, his particular manner of presiding at certain meals which already possessed a sacred significance of their own, his assembling and training of disciples after a pattern customary in Judaism. In each case, and in many more, we find institutions with characteristic purposes, structure and functions, all subjected to change by this new life.

To assert that the Church possesses an institutional character and is articulated in a multiplicity of institutions, does in no way imply a derogation of the intensely personal quality of its *koinonia*. On the contrary, by the term *koinonia* we understand the communion into which God in Christ through the Holy Spirit binds the believer to himself and to all fellow-believers by baptism and the ministry of reconciliation (II Cor. 5. 17). Thus in the Church, in the community of the Spirit, the dichotomy of institution and *koinonia* is overcome. The institutional patterns of the Church provide an ordered structure for the common life, through which God imparts his gracious love to man and makes a personal existence in freedom and responsibility manifest. Thus the institutional pattern of the Church gives an insight into the nature of all human existence.

4. Institutional Dimensions of the Church

Against the background of these general reflections on a theology of institution we can now proceed to a consideration of those questions which more specifically concern a study of institutionalism and unity.

Throughout its history, the Christian Church has expressed its common life, its worship and mission in a variety of forms, institutionalized both by different self-images and by diverse historical and cultural circumstances. Granted that institutions are an integral aspect of the divine-human nature of the Church, the question inevitably arises : On what basis is it possible to distinguish between constitutive and permanent and, on the other hand, derivative and historically variable features ? And further : in which instances do institutional factors manifest the one Church, and in which instances do they express a distortion or disruption, that is, institutionalism in the pejorative sense of the word ? The two questions are intimately related, for if certain institutional structures and functions can be identified as constitutive for the Church (which by definition is one), then a cardinal theological criterion is found for distinguishing between factors which express that unity and others which obscure or negate it.

It scarcely needs to be pointed out that even such a criterion of high theological order, however carefully defined, does not ensure any ultimate certainty. It is itself subject to historical change and differing interpretation. In its application, the ambivalences and complexities of the institutional life of the Church do not allow any unqualified conclusions or judgments. And, above all, the truth must not be lost sight of, that the life-giving presence of the Spirit in the community of believers can never be conclusively and exhaustively discerned in its institutional manifestations. God is not bounded by his institutions.

Keeping in mind this tentative nature of our undertaking, we might use the traditional distinction between 'order and organization' as a clue for differentiating between several institutional dimensions of the Church. Perhaps some other

patterns of analysis could delineate with greater precision the sociological features of the institution. We feel, however, that the present approach can serve the purposes of our report more adequately.

Order is in this context taken to denote the visible complex of institutions which is held to be essential to the continuous existence and identity of the Church as a community in history. Organization, on the other hand, refers to the broad range of institutional elements which, under varying historical conditions, express some aspect or other of the community which is structured and sustained by that 'order.'

Developing this distinction, we would discern the following six aspects of order and organization :

(i) The Church itself as divinely instituted.

(ii) The three essential and enduring dominical institutions : the Gospel, the Sacraments, and the Ministry (however its particular form may be conceived) through which these are administered.

(iii) The community in its responsive functions through which the lordship of Christ is acknowledged and proclaimed to the world — such as worship, preaching and teaching, pastoral care, service to the needy, and social action.

(iv) The interdependence of all churches and Christian groups in the Body of Christ, however separated historically.

(v) The gathering of Christians in local congregations and other determinate patterns of common life and activity.

(vi) The organizational, administrative, legal, financial and other arrangements and procedures which are needed for the continuous life and mission of the Christian community.

It is in keeping with our Christian belief in the Incarnation to affirm that the Church through all these institutional dimensions, though in varying degrees, is imbedded and involved in the conditions of society and history. Conversely, it is equally true that all of these institutional patterns — even to financial campaigns and bureaucratic regulations — possess theological dignity, though again in varying degrees. The exact nature of the distinctions here suggested, and their application in practice, will require further clarification. But one conclusion stands out. Over against certain traditional misconceptions it must be insisted that no sharp disjunction is permissible between the realm of church order and the realm of organization — as if the latter were a matter of practical expediency alone, left to determination by secular values. The various types of institution fulfil necessary functions, though their importance differs.

They are all governed, however indirectly, by an ultimately controlling purpose : the reconciling ministry of God in Christ to the world, and the sustenance of the life and work of the Church as it lives by, and shares in, that ministry.

5. Need for Ecumenical Institutionalization

Despite its manifold involvement in society and its present brokenness, the Church as here described and believed is nevertheless the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. God's redemptive action, reconciling the world unto himself, is a work of reunion, and the Church and its entire complex of institutions are set to express and reflect the same reconciling and unifying purpose.

This insight entails significant theological consequences when appraising the divisive and unitive impact of institutional factors.

(a) The Evanston Assembly in 1954 contrasted diversity and division as follows : 'There is diversity which is not sinful but good because it reflects both the diversities of gifts of the Spirit in the one Body and diversities of creation by the one Creator. But when diversity disrupts the manifest unity of the Body, then it changes its quality and becomes sinful division. It is sinful because it obscures from men the sufficiency of Christ's atonement, insomuch as the Gospel of reconciliation is denied in the very lives of those who proclaim it.'[1] This applies likewise to institutions. Differences in denominational polity, organization, administration, etc., are in part natural and legitimate expressions of the diversity of historical and cultural circumstances which condition the life of the Christian community. But when denominational structures and patterns of activity obscure or disrupt 'the manifest unity of the Body,' they fall under the judgment of sinful division no less than do similar distortions in faith and worship. Indeed, because of the powerful tendency of time-honoured institutions to resist the dynamics of change, situations may occur when some institutional pattern — and no irreconcilable religious difference — becomes a major, though perhaps unrecognized or unavowed, obstacle to unity.

The cultural and political estrangement between the East and the West in the Middle Ages, which was such a potent element in institutionalizing Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, and the established status of some European churches today, are examples deserving consideration from this point of view.

(*b*) With the rediscovery in our time of the unity of the Church, the traditional denominational structures are becoming increasingly obsolescent, insomuch as they reflect the situation of a pre-ecumenical age. Hence the churches are now faced with the challenging task of seeking new and creative forms of ecumenical institutionalization which more adequately manifest their common belief in the one Church of the one Lord. It follows from the entire preceding argument that this cannot mean monolithic uniformity or institutional centralization. But neither does the postulate of ecumenical institutionalization allow that the unity which the Church is called to manifest can be reduced to a formal or spiritual unity alone. For that unity is articulated in the essential order instituted by Christ for his Church. To reflect and embody this order in the shifting contingencies of history is therefore the proximate purpose and norm of ecumenical institutionalization.

V. TOWARDS AN ECUMENICAL STRATEGY

The theological and sociological analysis which has been undertaken in the preceding sections sheds significant light on the institutional functions, structures and dynamics of the churches both as they operate individually and as they act in relation to one another. In the light of this analysis, several criteria and guiding principles can be framed which bear upon ecumenical strategy in relation to institutional factors. These principles include :

[1] *Evanston Speaks*, p. 13.

1. Self-criticism and Renewal

'Judgment begins at the house of the Lord.' A discriminating approach to institutional factors requires a high degree of self-awareness and readiness to accept desirable changes. The divisive influence of such factors frequently remains unnoticed and unrecognized. Since the Church's social role as a conserver of traditional values tends to emphasize the maintenance function of institutions, it is always in danger of inhibiting initiation and innovation. To what extent are the various institutions of church life able to exercise adequate self-appraisal and to be servants of genuine renewal? What institutional patterns are serving or hindering such renewal?

2. Actualizing the Nature and Purpose of the Church

Institutional criticism inquires whether the churches actually exhibit the common life proper to the Body of Christ, whether their policies and processes are effectively focussed on the mission in the world, and whether their members acknowledge the disciplines of loyal churchmanship.

3. Apostolic Continuity and Flexibility

As a society in history, the Church is characterized by continuity as well as adaptability. The essential institutions of the apostolic tradition — Word, Sacraments, and Ministry — are the visible means and signs of its identity through the ages [1]. At the same time, just because these institutions are the means by which God communicates his gracious love to ever new generations, the forms in which they are embodied can never be made absolute but must remain subject to constant review and diversified adaptation.

4. Ecumenical Awareness

Interdenominational efforts and union projects require an imaginative awareness of ecumenical realities and opportunities on the part of both denominational leaders and the rank and file. The glaring discrepancy which can frequently be observed between the ecumenical utterances and the everyday administration of religious bodies, points to the necessity of effecting institutional reforms which will make the cultivation of ecumenical awareness a built-in feature of denominational programmes and activities.

5. Functional Adequacy

The ecumenical movement by its very existence confronts the churches with a new test of functional adequacy. The existing institutional structures of the churches are obsolescent; although they may have effectively served denominational purposes in a pre-ecumenical age, they are now no longer functionally adequate to the transcendent purposes and challenges of the Church universal.

[1] This general statement remains valid whether continuity with the apostolic age is held to include episcopal succession or not.

6. Coherence and Diversification

Like all large organizations, the churches must provide for both coherence and diversification. The present multiplicity of Christian groups cannot be rationalized as a means of insuring 'healthy competition and free enterprise in religion.' It involves, on the contrary, a spiritually indefensible fragmentation and dissipation of resources. The recovery of the religious wholeness of the Church has its complement in an institutional coherence which provides for diversity and creative emulation. This principle of combining coherence with diversification is of particular importance for such bodies as councils of churches, since they today are among the chief laboratories of ecumenical institutionalization.

7. Sensitivity to Recognized Need

Diversification develops in response to need, yet bureaux and agencies set up to meet these needs may contribute to such specialized and rigid structures as to defeat the Church's spiritual obligation to be sensitive to recognized need. Church agencies need to be flexible and comprehensive, as well as responsive to changing circumstances. Bureaux need to be continually redesigned in order that specialized services can be modified to meet new situations.

8. Situational Relevance

This criterion is an immediate corollary of the Church's involvement in history. One of the most difficult tasks in an institutional analysis is that of properly distinguishing between the essential and enduring functions of the Church, and their transient embodiments. It is a notorious fact that ecclesiastical institutions tend to stabilize the contingencies of a hallowed past by elevating them to the dignity of the timeless. This is a subtle form of unhistorical docetism which overlooks the basic truth that it is the function of the institutional life of the Church to let the eternal and the past become a living reality here and now. And our 'here and now' is the call to ecumenical mission.

VI. SOME CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

It will have become apparent from the foregoing that the Commission's effort to map out an uncharted territory is still in its exploratory stage. Both the general discussion and the case studies have amply evidenced the powerful and pervasive influence of institutional factors. But they have at the same time demonstrated the difficulty of isolating such factors and assessing their often ambivalent relationship to unity and disunity. Institutional elements are so intimately intertwined that they sometimes seem to exchange identities. What at one stage of a union negotiation appears as a theological difference may in another stage appear as an organizational obstacle, and vice versa. To establish connections of cause and effect is a hazardous enterprise in any field of inquiry abounding in human intangibles ; and this is conspicuously true here.

It would be premature to propound any definitive conclusions. The Commission has tried to formulate some tentative findings which may serve the purpose of testing the soundness of its approach. It is hoped that these will evoke criticisms and constructive suggestions that will help in the further elucidation of issues and methods.

Institutional factors are involved in any and every aspect of unity and disunity — be it ecumenical endeavours in a local community, the system of communication and co-operation between denominations, practices of intercommunion, and so forth. The significance and import of a particular factor may well be different in, for example, the context of co-operation between denominational agencies and the context of church union. Hence there is need for more refined differentiations in analysing the unitive or divisive influence of institutional factors than we have done so far.

Our present findings are focussed on church union negotiations as being the most sensitive and difficult area. These deal with two different though overlapping segments of the subject. The first set, called here sociological conclusions, is primarily derived from the case studies undertaken by the Commission. They cover such items as ethos, 'vision,' distribution of power, institutional style, the art of negotiation, and the like. The second set of observations refers to a different kind of analysis in which the influence of institutional factors is related to the successive phases of church union processes. Because of the limited range of the source data, the validity of these generalizations will require further testing.

1. Sociological Conclusions

There are, first of all, some aspects of the Church as an institution which are not, strictly speaking, doctrinal but affect church union negotiations.

(1) Differences in ethos are as important in some situations as differences in doctrine. Churches may be agreed in doctrine on many basic points and yet fail to unite because they have different types of ethos. One denomination may be oriented more in worship and its cultus may include a flexible doctrine of what its form or way of worship means; another may be oriented more in doctrinal issues and hence stress greater precision on what the way of worship signifies. The different types of ethos become institutionalized and so the postures of denominations may be quite different as they negotiate with each other.

(2) Theological orientation and tradition affect the 'vision' of a denomination. This vision informs policy and governs, in part, expenditure of church funds and allocation of personnel. This intangible vision relates to denominational goals and calling, affects emphases and the spirit of mission. Goals, in turn, affect the profile of administration.

There are, in the second place, a number of factors which relate to organization and polity, to the distribution of power and centres of initiative, and to staff relationships.

(1) In church union the amalgamation of the administrative organizations cannot take place without tension and negotiation that is political in character and form. Skill in the political handling of administrative negotiations in the face of inevitable tension may be decisive.

(2) The administrative factors (proper organization, interstaff relationships, fiscal procedures) require as much time and energy to formulate as does basic general policy based on doctrine and polity.

(3) 'Institutional style' is an important factor and varies often from denomination to denomination. This 'style' reflects the general patterns of life dominant

in the cultural and social affiliations of the denomination. Factors such as class, status, and cultural sophistication are important not only in local communities but tend to apply to denominations as a whole and to define their relations to other churches.

(4) The prevailing concept of the locus of power and authority to initiate policy and action, and to make administrative decisions, deeply affects the outlook and morale of personnel who are affected by prospective mergers or other types of union.

(5) Quite apart from formal or national structures, the orders of personal authority are of great importance.

In the third place, there are important observations to be made regarding the process of negotiation and the quality of communication within and between the negotiating bodies.

(1) Communication in negotiation is as important as any other social factor in effecting greater unity. If communication is not to break down, there must be a sense of basic spiritual equality and respect between the denominations involved.

(2) Where the churches are of a representative democratic style of polity, it is an error to conduct negotiations in secrecy. There must be a strategy for the total process of communication at all levels.

(3) Preparation of the local congregations in ecumenical awareness and for the anticipated future merged or united life is indispensable.

(4) The *kairos* of unity is important. Sound historical timing is another way of defining this factor.

(5) Tension may increase as the threshold of overt unity is approached. It is necessary to have a strategy and a mechanism to help the churches over the no-man's land of anxiety as they pass through the threshold. Permanent commissions with a broad and a clear mandate are needed to hold the churches steady in this situation.

Finally, some tentative conclusions may be presented with respect to ecumenical developments and agencies.

(1) Ecumenical institutionalism is not a neutral factor. It plays as positive a role in the developing future of church unity as do the institutional factors of the individual denominations.

(2) In due course councils of churches tend to socialize the participating member in the direction of practical co-operation, since so much of church life in the council movement is not directly based on doctrinal convictions.

(3) Institutionalized co-operation may become fixated and thus be a hindrance to more advanced steps of church unity. Such institutional drift does not assure the unity we seek or need, or the unity that Christ wills.

(4) While Faith and Order Commissions are working in their ivory towers of theological study, many forces are shaping the life and context of the churches as well as of the World Council of Churches, and conditioning their future.

2. Institutional Factors Relating to the Successive Phases of Church Union Processes

Church unions cannot be understood as isolated acts or events. They are processes which, in turn, form particular instances of the perpetual interplay of unitive and divisive forces. Conflicts and disruptions are recurrent features in Christian history; yet at the same time the common participation in the one body of Christ holds the divided churches together and places them, in their divided state, under the imperative to live as *uniting* churches.

In considering the bearing of institutional factors upon union efforts, it is important therefore to keep in mind not only the actual phase of union negotiations, but also the preceding stage of still existing divisions as well as the subsequent stage of growth in unity after the enactment of a union. Each of these three stages presents distinct problems and tasks of institutionalization which deserve some further consideration even at the risk of reiterating certain conclusions which have already been set forth above.

(a) *Before a Union*

The call to unity which is the great challenge to a divided Church today involves not only a spiritual but also an administrative preparation for union. This is an aspect of the ecumenical movement which has received all too little attention thus far. Such a preparedness includes several tasks:

(1) It requires from each church that it arrange its institutional structures and processes in such a fashion that these serve to 'keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,' providing facilities for unrestricted communication between contending factions in a period of conflict and for their eventual reconciliation. It would be possible to indicate situations in which the existence of a solid institutional framework has been a major means of preventing a dangerous crisis from deteriorating into an open split. The grave conflict which has arisen in recent years in the Church of Sweden around the question of ordination of women is a case in point.

(2) The rules and practices of ecclesiastical bureaucracy tend to enhance and ossify the denominational self-image. Hence preparedness for union requires of the churches that they seek to counteract that tendency by establishing recognized institutional channels which facilitate interdenominational communication, both within and outside the official ecumenical fellowship, and which provide flexibility for a church to respond quickly and effectively to rising opportunities for rapprochement with other churches.

(b) *During Union Negotiations*

(1) A commitment to church unity and enthusiasm for its realization does not dissolve the problems of institutionalism. Organizational arrangements and procedures acquire over the years a momentum of their own which frequently runs counter to the professed goals of union and may form stubborn obstacles to the attainment of these goals — all the more powerful if they remain ignored or unavowed. Thus, whatever a uniting church may believe about the theological significance of institutional factors, it cannot safely disregard their actual influence on the negotiations.

(2) It must frankly be recognized that the amalgamation of organizational and administrative structures is an operation which, as all such institutional operations, involves power struggles and compromises which are political in

character and form. On the other hand, since such problems belong to the realm of *church* politics, it is essential that their solution should be controlled by the vision of the greater church which the union is intended to realize. The area where this principle assumes particular importance is that of the institutional provisions made to safeguard the legitimate rights of dissenting or non-uniting minority groups.

(3) A union affects the entire life and the total membership of the churches concerned. Hence it is imperative for the successful completion of a union that the negotiation committees are truly representative in composition and outlook, and that adequate channels are established for communication not only with the decision-making authorities but also with the rank and file of the uniting bodies. Recent ecumenical history records admirable union schemes which proved to be abortive because they failed to elicit broad support, or which left painful scars of dissatisfaction and opposition.

(4) Experience has shown the wisdom of allowing a transitional period of some duration in which adjustments can be made and the uniting bodies can grow together in fellowship, before final actions are taken concerning liturgy, organizational structure, and the like. In cases where such decisions are formalized at the time of unification, they inevitably, however imaginative, tend to reflect the outlook of the negotiating churches in their state of separation, and not the corporate mind of the new church.

(c) *After the Enactment of Union*

(1) If the local church is but a manifestation of the universal Church, sharing in all its privileges and responsibilities, then it is clear that a union, to be genuine, must above all become an actuality at the local level. Pastoral prudence may dictate the acceptance of gradual measures in unifying the forms of worship and the procedures and practices of local congregations belonging to the uniting bodies. Nevertheless, a union which does not issue in united and renewed congregations fails to accomplish the purpose of witnessing to the oneness of Christ's Church at the crucial point where disunity most directly touches the lives of both believers and unbelievers.

(2) Similarly, a union falls short of its goal if the new church does not function as a nucleus of a larger movement of rapprochement and union around it. This goal has been expressly recognized in various union schemes, as, for example, in the Church of South India. A valuable means to this end is the maintenance of full fellowship with the sister churches and the world denominational associations of the uniting bodies.

VII. FOR FURTHER STUDY

In concluding its work, the Commission wishes to commend to the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order (or to such bodies as the Conference may wish to continue study of Institutionalism in the churches) two enquiries upon which it has only been able to touch — enquiries calling both for constructive reflection and for empirical analysis.

(a) What constitutes the divinely instituted 'order' of the one Church? And how can that 'order' find appropriate forms of 'organization' in the present ecumenical age? This includes a consideration of the manner in which institu-

tional structures and functions which have developed in the history of Christian division can be integrated in reunited churches. The principle enunciated by the Faith and Order movement, that a reunited church must in some fashion incorporate the episcopal, presbyteral, and congregational systems in its organic wholeness, is a significant contribution to the elucidation of this problem which calls for further exploration. The topic also raises the question of the ecclesiological significance to be ascribed to the modern phenomenon of councils of churches.

(b) An analysis and evaluation of the World Council of Churches or of a national council of churches as a field laboratory of ecumenical institutionalization.

In view of the general importance of these matters for the life and witness of the churches today, the Commission on Institutionalism further wishes to suggest a number of research problems and case studies which deserve the attention of interested scholars :

(a) A comparative study of the processes by which denominational bodies establish policies and arrive at corporate decisions.

(b) Similarities and dissimilarities in the actual status and functions of 'overseers' (bishops, moderators, executives, etc.).

(c) The sociological and ecclesiological significance of the increasing power of administrative boards and secretariats, and their changing relations to the traditional authority-structures of the churches.

(d) The discrepancy between the credal position of a denomination and the actual beliefs of its membership as a problem of institutionalism.

(e) The conflict between the self-institutionalization of a church and its institutionalization by the environment (both hostile and friendly) in relation to ethical standards and patterns of conduct.

(f) The involvement of class structure in church unions.

(g) Institutional factors involved in specific instances of interchurch relations or union projects, such as the relations between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland ; the symbiosis of different denominational structures in the Evangelical Church in Germany ; and the tension between denominational patterns of foreign missions and the emerging dynamics of ecumenical mission.

(h) Institutional factors in the accommodation of a denomination to a new culture, as, for example, the sociological shape of younger churches living under the dual influence of western traditions and predominantly non-Christian cultures ; and Eastern Orthodoxy in the USA and in South America.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Dean Walter G. Muelder (Methodist Church USA), Boston, USA, *Chairman*.
Professor Nils Ehrenström (Lutheran Church in America), Boston, USA, *Secretary*.
Dr. Hans Dombois (Evangelical Church in Germany), Heidelberg, Germany.
Dean Charles R. Feilding (Anglican Church of Canada), Toronto, Canada.
Professor James M. Gustafson (United Church of Christ USA), New Haven, USA.
Professor Berndt Gustafsson (Church of Sweden), Lund, Sweden.
Professor William S. F. Pickering (Church of England), Winnipeg, Canada.
Professor Franklin E. Rector (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis, USA.
Professor Heinz-Horst Schrey (Evangelical Church in Germany), Berlin, Germany.
Professor Frederick A. Shippey (Methodist Church, USA), Madison, NJ, USA.

The following also attended one or more meetings as consultants:

Dr. Keith Bridston.
Dr. William B. Cate.
The Rev. John H. S. Kent.
Dr. Wolf-Dieter Marsch.
The Rev. W. A. Norgren.
Professor H. E. Stotts.

PUBLICATIONS

The symposium referred to on p. 5 of the Report is published under the title *Institutionalism and Church Unity* (Association Press, New York, and SCM Press, London, 1963). This contains essays on basic issues arising out of the Commission's study and on institutional factors in individual church union cases.

The papers relating to one of the case studies have been published in a separate volume entitled *Anglican-Methodist Relations : Some Institutional Factors*, ed. by W. S. F. Pickering (London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961).

The following is a list of some articles and reports which also have arisen out of the work of the Commission :

DOMBOIS, HANS, 'Das institutionelle Problem in der Oekumene,' *Oekumenische Rundschau* VII : 1 (Januar 1958), pp. 12-20.

EHRENSTRÖM, NILS and MUELDER, WALTER G., 'Reports on Institutionalism,' *Minutes of the Faith and Order Commission*, 1956-1960.

'Institutionalism.' A special issue of the *Bulletin of the Division of Studies*, World Council of Churches, Vol. IV : 1 (Spring 1960).

MARSCH, WOLF-DIETER, 'Kirche als Institution in der Gesellschaft,' *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 4 (1960), pp. 73-92.

MUELDER, WALTER G., 'Institutional Factors Affecting Unity and Disunity,' *The Ecumenical Review* VIII : 2 (January 1956), pp. 113-126.

— 'Institutionalism in Relation to Unity and Disunity,' *The Nature of the Unity We Seek. Official Report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order ; Oberlin, Ohio, 1957*, ed. by Paul S. Minear (St. Louis : The Bethany Press, 1958), pp. 90-102.

RECTOR, FRANKLIN E., 'Behind the Breakdown of Baptist-Disciple Conversations on Unity,' *Foundations* IV : 2 (April 1961).

SCHREY, HEINZ-HORST, 'Die nicht-theologischen Faktoren der Kirchentrennung,' *Monatsschrift für Pastoral-Theologie* 48 (März 1959), pp. 84-93.